



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



Brussels, 24 July 2012
12938/12
PRESSE 353

**ELEVENTH MEETING OF
THE EU-ISRAEL ASSOCIATION COUNCIL**

Statement of the European Union

1. The European Union (EU) warmly welcomes this 11th meeting of the EU-Israel Association Council as a demonstration of the significance the EU attaches to its relations with the State of Israel. The EU reiterates the importance of further developing our broad bilateral partnership and looks forward to a comprehensive dialogue and cooperation with our Israeli counterparts.

P R E S S

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2. The EU takes note of the efforts of both parties to develop **bilateral relations** in the period since the previous meeting of the EU-Israel Association Council. These efforts were framed by the general EU position, as it was established on the occasion of the June 2009 Association Council, that the 2008 decision to upgrade our relations in the framework of the ENP clearly stemmed from common awareness of the traditional links, the cultural and human values, and the economic and security interests that the EU and Israel share. That upgrade must be based on the shared values of both parties, and particularly on democracy and respect for human rights, the rule of law and fundamental freedoms, good governance and international humanitarian law. The upgrade needs also to be, and to be seen, in the context of the broad range of our common interests and objectives. These notably include the resolution of the Israel-Palestinian conflict through the implementation of the two-state solution, the promotion of peace, prosperity and stability in the Middle East and the search for joint answers to challenges which could threaten these goals. In addition, these efforts were a response to the commitment taken on the occasion of the February 2011 Association Council to further explore with Israel the opportunities still offered by the current EU-Israel ENP Action Plan in a number of sectors and policy areas, and to pursue technical talks in order to identify areas for future potential cooperation. On the basis of such guidance, the two parties held comprehensive discussions in 2011-2012, which were reflected in the Association Committee's minutes and annexes attached to this statement. In this context:

- On the functioning of the instruments of association, the EU expresses its satisfaction with the completion of the full cycle of meetings of all sub-committees in 2009-2012, and with the organisation of the 2 May 2012 Association Committee meeting, the first in four years. The EU acknowledges the need for both parties to make more efforts in order to further enhance the functioning of all instruments established under the EU-Israel Association Agreement at all levels with the goal of developing a dynamic, meaningful and effective dialogue. The EU welcomes the measures approved by the Association Committee, as they are described in Annex 2 to the minutes of its 2 May 2012 meeting, and encourages the two parties to jointly implement them.
- On **exploring the opportunities of the current Action Plan**, the EU recalls the exhaustive discussions on the issue, which resulted in a comprehensive list of up to 60 concrete activities in over 15 specific fields, including cooperation with a number of EU agencies within the current policy framework, as they are presented in Annex 3 to the minutes of the Association Committee meeting. The EU welcomes the approval of these activities by the Association Committee and encourages the two parties to actively and urgently implement them, so as to fully demonstrate the capacity of the current EU-Israel Action Plan to deliver more benefits to the EU-Israel partnership.

- On **areas for future potential cooperation**, as described in Annex 4 to the minutes of the Association Committee meeting, the EU recalls that both parties were engaged in technical talks in 2011-2012. This work helped to make substantial progress towards the identification of over 20 specific areas for future potential cooperation. The EU takes note of this technical work and stands ready to continue it whenever necessary and, when the conditions for proceeding towards an upgrade of bilateral relations are met, take a political position on the implementation of such proposed areas.
3. The package of documents adopted on 15 May 2012 on the functioning of **the new European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP)**, which includes the progress report on Israel for 2011, confirms the EU's commitment, as stated in the Council Conclusions on the ENP of 20 June 2011, to fully implementing a partnership for democracy and shared prosperity in its Southern neighbourhood on the basis of mutual accountability and shared commitment to universal values of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law, in dialogue and cooperation with partners and also with the aim of developing synergies with the Union for the Mediterranean and other regional initiatives. In this context, enhancing the values of democracy and the importance of a vibrant civil society, respect for human rights and for the rights of persons belonging to minorities stand central to the EU-Israel partnership. They will continue to occupy a key role in the EU's dialogue with the Israeli authorities and will be regularly monitored by means of the annual progress reports and by reporting on specific issues by EU delegations and the missions of its Member States.
 4. Israel continued to benefit from a yearly allocation through the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) in the form of institutional cooperation (**twinning projects**). The EU takes note with satisfaction of the successful completion in the past year of twinning projects with the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission and the Ministry of Communications. The EU encourages Israel to consolidate the central coordination role played by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in order to fully exploit the potential of the twinning instrument.
 5. The EU remains fully committed to **the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM)**, in which 43 partners from the EU and the Mediterranean engage with a view to effectively addressing common regional challenges. There is now an opportunity to give the UfM a new impetus, in close synergy with the ENP, especially in view of the activities of the new Secretary General, the new arrangements for the transfer of the Northern co-presidency and the recent decision of Jordan to assume the Southern co-presidency, as well as the tangible progress in approving projects under the UfM label. The EU welcomes Israel's role and engagement in developing the UfM partnership.
 6. The EU reiterates its fundamental commitment to **Israel's security**, including with regard to vital threats in the region, which is best guaranteed through peace between Israel and its neighbours. The EU is appalled by recurring rocket attacks from Gaza and condemns in the strongest terms violence deliberately targeting civilians. The EU reiterates its call on all partners in the region for the effective prevention of arms smuggling into Gaza.

7. The EU believes, as set out in the EU Foreign Affairs Council Conclusions of 14 May 2012 on the **MEPP**, that an urgent resumption of substantive negotiations is needed aiming at a comprehensive solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Ending the conflict is a fundamental interest of the EU as well as of the parties themselves and the wider region, and it can be achieved through a comprehensive peace agreement, based on the relevant UN Security Council Resolutions, the Madrid principles including land for peace, the Roadmap, the agreements previously reached by the parties and the Arab Peace Initiative. The EU recalls the applicability of international humanitarian law in the occupied Palestinian territory, including the applicability of the 4th Geneva Convention relative to the protection of civilians. The EU wants to see the State of Israel and a sovereign, independent, democratic, contiguous and viable State of Palestine living side by side in peace and security. The legitimacy of the State of Israel and the right of Palestinians to achieve statehood must be fully respected. The EU calls on both parties to implement as soon as possible confidence-building measures so as to create an atmosphere conducive to the re-launching of peace efforts.
8. The EU considers it imperative that **the viability of a two-state solution** is maintained. The EU expresses deep concern about developments on the ground which threaten to make a two-state solution impossible, such as, inter alia, the marked acceleration of settlement construction, ongoing evictions of Palestinians and the demolition of their housing and infrastructure in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt), including East Jerusalem, the worsening living conditions of the Palestinian population and serious limitations for the Palestinian Authority to promote the economic development of Palestinian communities, in particular in Area C. The EU is also concerned about reports on a possible resumption of construction of the separation barrier because the EU considers that the separation barrier where built on occupied land is illegal under international law, constitutes an obstacle to peace and threatens to make a two-state solution impossible. Concerning these developments, the EU reiterates its determination to contribute to maintaining the viability of a two-state solution in accordance with international law and its positions, including the conclusions of the EU Foreign Affairs Council in December 2009, December 2010, May 2011 and May 2012. To that end, the EU will take steps to address the social and economic situation of the Palestinian population in Area C, will strengthen Palestinian planning capacities and, stressing Israel's obligations regarding the living conditions of the Palestinian population in that area, will engage with the Israeli authorities to work out improved mechanisms for the implementation of donor funded projects in that area. In the same vein, the EU will continue to fully and effectively implement existing EU legislation and the bilateral arrangement applicable to settlement products.
9. The EU expresses deep concern regarding **settler extremism** and incitement by settlers in the West Bank. The EU condemns continuous settler violence and deliberate provocations against Palestinian civilians. It calls on the government of Israel to bring the perpetrators to justice and to comply with its obligations under international law.

10. The EU reiterates that a way must be found through negotiations to resolve **the status of Jerusalem** as the future capital of two states. Until then, the EU calls for an equitable provision of resources and investment to the city's population. The EU calls for the reopening of Palestinian institutions in Jerusalem in accordance with the Roadmap.
11. The EU calls on Israel to ensure the protection and unimpeded access of all religious groups to **religious sites**, notably in Jerusalem.
12. The EU remains concerned by the situation in **the Gaza strip**. While fully recognizing Israel's security needs, the EU reiterates its call for the immediate, sustained and unconditional opening of crossings for the flow of humanitarian aid, commercial goods and persons to and from Gaza. The EU is also concerned about the humanitarian consequences of Israeli military action in the Gaza Strip. The situation in the Strip is unsustainable as long as it remains politically separated from the West Bank. Despite limited progress, the EU urges the government of Israel to take further meaningful and far-reaching steps allowing for the reconstruction and economic recovery of the Gaza Strip, including by allowing trade with the West Bank and Israel.
13. The EU has consistently called for **intra-Palestinian reconciliation** behind President Mahmoud Abbas as an important element for the unity of a future Palestinian state and for reaching a two states solution. Reconciliation should also be in the long term interest of Israel by helping to engage all parties in a process leading to a sustainable peace agreement.
14. The EU commends the work of **the Palestinian Authority** in building the institutions of a future State of Palestine and reiterates its commitment to the Palestinian state building process, including through CSDP missions and within the Quartet, aiming at a Palestinian state based on the rule of law and respect of human rights. The EU underlines the risk of jeopardising the major achievements of the Palestinian Authority in state-building if the current financial difficulties are not addressed by a common effort of the Palestinian Authority, Israel and donors. Recalling the Palestinian institutions' responsibility under the Roadmap to end incitement, the EU expresses concern for incidents of incitement in Palestinian media and elsewhere.
15. The **situation in the Arab countries**, over a year after the start of political and social changes, is a source of both challenges and opportunities. Transitions will take time, and the possibility of new turbulences should not be excluded. The EU has reaffirmed its commitment to the emerging democracies, including through its response in the ENP framework providing assistance in building democratic institutions and supporting inclusive growth. The EU has publicly and repeatedly stressed the importance of engaging positively with the new emerging leaderships. Public opinion will play an increasing role in the foreign policy of South Mediterranean partners, which should mobilise renewed efforts towards solving long-standing conflicts. The fundamental changes in the Arab world highlight the need for progress on the Middle East Peace Process (MEPP) and for overcoming the current stalemate, while respecting previous agreements and obligations.

16. The EU welcomes the peaceful conduct of presidential elections in **Egypt** that led to the election of Mohamed Morsi and stresses the importance for the new President to stand for national unity and reconciliation and represent the rights of all Egyptians. The EU welcomes President Morsi's pledge that Egypt will continue to respect all its international obligations. In this context, the EU underlines the importance of the continued implementation of the 1979 Egypt-Israel peace treaty as a crucial building block for peace in the region. In full awareness of Egypt's key role in the region, the EU stresses the importance of Egypt's continued commitment to the goal of building stability, peace and prosperity around the Mediterranean and in the Middle East.
17. The EU is gravely concerned at the intensification of violence, the potential for a deeper crisis in **Syria** and its regional implications. While stressing that the main responsibility for the current situation lies with the Syrian regime, the EU calls for a complete cessation of violence by all parties. The EU recalls its full support to Kofi Annan's plan and welcomes his efforts to work with key international partners to move the political process forward. The EU welcomes the outcome of the Action Group meeting in Geneva on 30 June 2012, which offers concrete points for action aimed at bringing about an end to violence and launches a political process in Syria led by Syrians, including the establishment of a transitional governing body with full executive powers. The EU calls for united action by the UN Security Council to add more robust and effective pressure on the Syrian regime.
18. The EU reiterates continued commitment to **Lebanon**'s unity, stability, independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity. The EU recalls the need for the full implementation of all relevant UNSC Resolutions, including 1559, 1680, 1701 and 1757. The EU stresses that it is the obligation of all parties concerned to ensure effective implementation of UNSC Resolution 1701. The EU supports and commends the crucial role of UNIFIL, whose activities alongside the Lebanese Armed Forces continue to be essential for peace in the region. The EU encourages Israel and Lebanon to find a peaceful solution to the disagreements over demarcation of their Exclusive Economic Zones in Eastern Mediterranean Sea.
19. The EU remains determined to work towards a negotiated solution to **the Iranian nuclear issue**, and urges Iran to comply fully and without further delay with its obligations under the relevant resolutions of the UN Security Council and the IAEA. The EU calls for a constructive and responsible Iranian role in the region, notably in relation to the MEPP, including the acceptance of a solution based on two states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security. Iran should end its support to violent groups in the region, use its influence constructively and encourage them to follow a non-violent political approach conducive to peace and stability for the region.

20. The EU is committed to continuing its ongoing fruitful cooperation with Israel as regards the fight against xenophobia, discrimination and **anti-Semitism**, including through annual joint seminars. Events over the past year underline the need, within the EU, to continue to ensure all citizens can live their lives free of fear of violence and hate crime. Internationally, the EU is deeply disturbed by racist and anti-Semitic statements made by Iranian officials and reiterates the EU's absolute commitment to combating racism and anti-Semitism. The EU condemns any attempt to deny, trivialise or minimise the Holocaust as a historical fact, either in whole or in part. The EU is committed to exploring further areas of cooperation on Holocaust remembrance, especially in the light of the increasing importance of remembrance activities in the proposed 2014-2020 Europe for Citizens programme.
21. The EU welcomes the opportunity of a regular dialogue with the Israeli side on **human rights** issues of common concern, both within the State of Israel and in the occupied territories. As stated in the minutes of the 2 May 2012 EU-Israel Association Committee meeting, the EU stands by its view that the informal working group on human rights should be transformed into a subcommittee on human rights and democratic governance in the framework of the EU-Israel Association Agreement. Considering it essential to preserve the universal character of the global human rights system and governments' responsibility to fully engage with it, the EU calls on Israel to resume full cooperation with the UN Human Rights Council and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Neither Israel nor the work of these institutions benefits from Israel's voice not being heard.
22. The EU encourages Israel to increase efforts to address the economic and social situation of the **Arab minority**, to enhance their integration in Israeli society and protect their rights. While recognising the complexity of the situation, the EU underlines the importance to address it as a core problem in its own right, with efforts required from both the government of Israel and the Arab minority leadership, and emphasizes the need for Israel to seek comprehensive solutions to its many aspects while being guided by the commitment, as a democratic state, to ensure the equality of all its citizens. The EU also encourages Israel to seek equitable and sustainable solutions with regard to the unrecognised Bedouin villages in close consultation with the communities concerned.
23. The EU recalls that support for **human rights defenders** is a long established element of the European Union's human rights external relations policy. The EU considers that in both Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory human rights defenders play an important role in promoting the common values of democracy, peace and human rights. The EU recalls the legitimate right of Palestinians to engage in peaceful demonstrations.

24. The EU remains concerned about the excessive recourse by Israel to **administrative detention** without charge. Under international law, detainees have the right to be informed about the reasons underlying any detention and to have the legality of their detention being determined without undue delay. The EU calls upon Israel to bring formal charges against individuals, with such charges being determined through fair trials. The EU welcomes the recent agreement reached on conditions of detention in Israeli prisons and urges both sides to abide by their undertakings.
25. The EU also recalls the importance of a vibrant NGO sector and **civil society** in general and the vital role they play in open and democratic societies. The EU notes that in the ENP Action Plan Israel and the EU have agreed to engage in a regular dialogue on civil society issues and to promote EU-Israel links between civil society organizations and NGOs. The sub-committees created under the EU-Israel Association Agreement also have the necessary remit, which should be effectively used. The EU calls on Israel to promote its active NGO sector and to refrain from actions which may complicate the space in which civil society organisations operate, may curtail freedom of association and freedom of speech or may attempt to challenge the independence of the Supreme Court.
26. The EU is Israel's first **trading partner** and, at the same time, Israel stands among the EU's biggest trading partners in the Mediterranean area, with total trade amounting to almost €30 billion in 2011. The two parties continued their successful cooperation in addressing market access problems. The EU recalls the importance of the Technical Arrangement between the EU and Israel on products originating from settlements. In order to increase transparency and efficiency, Commission services are proceeding with some adjustments in its implementation.
27. The EU acknowledges Israel's close co-operation with the EU when trade irritants arise. However, the EU continues to be seriously concerned about the **anti-dumping** and safeguards investigations that have been initiated in Israel since 2009 and about some transparency-related aspects of their conduct. As stated in the minutes of the 2 May 2012 EU-Israel Association Committee, the EU believes that such investigations fail to respect WTO commitments, including as regards the respect of deadlines for decisions. The EU calls on Israel to correct this practice.
28. The EU recalls the commitment taken by Israel and the Palestinian Authority at the Trade Ministerial Conference of the Union for the Mediterranean of 11 November 2010. The EU encourages both parties to organise a trilateral ministerial meeting without delay with a view to discussing additional measures for the **facilitation of Palestinian trade** and the establishment of a trade trilateral working group.

29. The adoption of the protocol on the Agreement on Conformity Assessment and Acceptance of Industrial Products (ACAA) and the enabling protocol on Israel's participation in EU programmes would be mutually beneficial for bilateral relations and significant for Israel's integration into the EU internal market. The EU recalls that the signature of both protocols implements commitments made previously, in conformity with the 2005 EU-Israel ENP Action Plan. They are distinct and unrelated to discussions of an upgrade of relations. The EU stands ready to proceed with the rapid implementation of the two protocols once they enter into force.
30. The EU and Israel signed an agreement on trade in agricultural, processed agricultural, fish and fishery products in November 2009, which entered into force on 1 January 2010. The implementation of this agreement has already led to a visible increase in overall bilateral trade in these sectors. The two parties are preparing to discuss a review of **the agricultural agreement**, which is scheduled for 2013. In 2011, the two parties signed a modification to this agreement with regard to trade in a few specific items, which was adopted by the EU Council on 23 April 2012, and was sent to the European Parliament for consent.
31. In the field of **environmental protection**, the EU finds the intensification of bilateral cooperation of the highest importance. The EU welcomes Israel's ratification of the Gaborone amendment to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and the protocols to the Barcelona Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean. The EU notes with satisfaction the first discussions held in April 2012 on **climate change** issues, in the framework of the relevant bilateral sub-committee.
32. In accordance with the current ENP Action Plan, the EU has launched preparations for the adoption of a decision by the EU-Israel Association Council on implementing Arts. 64 & 65 of the Association Agreement on the **coordination of the social security regimes** of EU Member States applicable to Israeli workers. Starting in April 2012, representatives of European Commission services discussed and exchanged information with their Israeli counterparts on this issue in April and June 2012, with further rounds of talks being planned later this year. The EU's objective is that a draft decision is submitted for adoption by the next EU-Israel Association Council at the latest or earlier by written procedure.
33. The EU expresses its satisfaction with bilateral cooperation in the sphere of **police and judicial cooperation**. The elaboration of an operational cooperation agreement between Israel and Europol has very much advanced. An important pending issue concerns data received by Europol, especially as regards distinguishing between information coming from the State of Israel and that stemming from activities of the Israeli authorities in the occupied territories. The EU invites Israel, as agreed previously, to make a proposal on this issue.

34. The EU welcomes the positive results of bilateral cooperation on **transport** issues. Negotiations on a “comprehensive civil aviation agreement” were completed in March 2012. The EU looks forward to the possibility of initialling the text of the agreement promptly. Cooperation between the EU and Israel in the Galileo programme was re-invigorated by the visit to Israel of Commission Vice-President Tajani and delivers very satisfactory results. As a follow-up to this visit, the EU encourages the completion of current discussions on implementation arrangements.
35. In the area of **science and technology**, the EU welcomes the increased cooperation with Israel under the 7th Framework Programme for Research and Development (FP7), where Israel has had a remarkable performance. On one hand, Israel is one of the most successful non-EU member states that are associated to FP7. On the other hand, the FP7 alone is now the main source of funding for competitive publicly funded research projects in Israel. The EU welcomes Israel’s interest in discussing the possibility of associating itself with the future EU programme on science and innovation.
36. The EU reiterates its position that Israel’s cooperation with some **EU agencies**, which is possible within the current framework, would enable the advancement of cooperation. In this context, the EU welcomes the recent signature, on the basis of relevant provisions of the current EU-Israel Action Plan, of an Administrative Arrangement between the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) in Stockholm and the Israel Centre for Disease Control (ICDC).
37. The EU looks forward to a fruitful and constructive meeting of the EU-Israel Association Council.
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